

THREE

DIALOGUES,

A DIALOGUE
BETWEEN A

MINISTER

1507/
1552

AND

ONE of his PARISHIONERS,

ON THE

TRUE PRINCIPLES of RELIGION,

AND

Salvation for Sinners by Jesus Christ,

THE ONLY

REDEEMER and SAVIOUR.

MANCHESTER,

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DIALOGUE I.

BETWEEN A

Minister and One of his Parishioners.

Minister.

NEIGHBOUR, good-morrow. I find you have been early up, and diligently employed; your cattle fed, and servants at work. I see thriving in the world is a matter very near your heart.

Parishioner. Ay, Sir, all this is necessary. Meat and clothes must be provided for; my Landlord's rent must be paid; and this requires much care and labour.

M. I would by no means discourage your industry. It is your duty not to be slothful in business. But, you know, you have another calling besides husbandry: the soul must be fed and clothed too.

P. Doubtless the soul ought to be minded in the first place, for that is the chief concern: but I hope, I do not neglect my soul and the world to come: I should be sorry you should think me so bad a man.

M. No particular reason to be suspicious of you more than of others. But when I look round, and observe the general unconcern about salvation in which men live, I am concerned for my fellow mortals: and with respect to you of this parish in particular, I think myself obliged to admonish you of your danger, that you may not die before you have obtained forgiveness of your sins through faith in Jesus Christ, and are made meet for an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

P. Lord! Sir, why should you entertain such uncharital thoughts of us?

M. Do



M. Do not so abuse the word *charity*: it signifies the same as *love*. Now love does not require that we think well of every body, with or without reason, but that we wish and intend well to every body. If I gave myself no trouble about you, that is, if I were utterly void of charity, you would think me a very charitable man.

P. But I hope you do not condemn us all: some of us indeed are wicked, swearing, drunken men; but we are not all so. You know yourself that I keep my church, and come sometimes to sacrament. I never hurted any man in my life, and pay every man his due.

M. And upon this you build your hopes of heaven?—If this is your foundation, I must plainly tell you, it will leave you hopeless in the day of trial. Let us examine it by the word of God.

“You never did hurt to any man.” You mean, I suppose, you never robbed or murdered any person; I do not think you have; but still you have committed much sin, and done much hurt, not only to others, but to your own soul, by great and numberless, nay, daily offences against the holy law of God. Nay, you have broken every one of his commandments.

P. Who could give you such an account of me?

M. You yourself, last Sunday. When you heard me repeat the commandments, you made answer after each of them, Lord, have mercy upon us, &c. Your calling for mercy was plainly acknowledging yourself guilty.

P. I never committed idolatry, murder, adultery—

M. Yes, all of them. Have you never loved any worldly thing more than God and his favour? nor feared any thing more than his displeasure, so as to neglect a known duty rather than draw upon yourself some temporal inconvenience? This was a breach of the first commandment. The second commandment respects the manner of expressing the devotion of the heart; and therefore whatever in your service has been unbecoming, such as wandering thoughts, carelessness, and irreverence, as well as using images, is a breach of this commandment: so is also neglect of God's service.

And

And here you will not pretend, I suppose, to be not guilty. Consequently, your coming to church and sacrament in this careless unthinking manner, deserves rather to be reckoned among your sins, than trusted to for justification before God. But a few minutes ago, in my hearing, you took the Lord's name in vain, using it needlessly, and without an awful sense of his majesty, of whom you spake. You have done the same, perhaps, ten thousand times. This is a breach of the third commandment. Whenever you have neglected to attend on God's worship on the sabbath without a necessary hindrance, suffered worldly thoughts to visit you for God's service, done worldly business on that day that might have been done on another, and neglected to devote the whole to God, by reading, hearing prayer, meditation, and useful conversation — you have profaned the Lord's day. The substance of these commandments, is, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart: but you have come short of this whenever you have not acted to the glory of God. Now what think you of your mindance with respect to the duties of the first table of the commandments?

P. I cannot pretend to justify myself with respect to God; but I am sure I have done no harm to man.

M. You would not say so if you understood the spirituality and extent of God's commandments, as explained by our Lord, in his Sermon on the Mount. There you find that wantonness in the eye or heart is esteemed (Matt. v. 28.) adultery in the sight of God; and careless (Matt. v. 22.) anger, especially injurious language, is accounted a degree of murder: and who can acquit himself of these?

If you take the same method to understand the other commandments, all parts of your behaviour that are unsuitable to the station in which Providence hath placed you, all irreverence and proud censuring of your superiors, and all unkind and injurious treatment of those that are beneath you, will appear to be breaches of the fifth commandment. All evil speaking, rash censuring, and repeating stories injurious to the character of others, are
contrary

contrary to the ninth: and all murmuring and discontent, envy and greediness, are sins forbidden by the tenth.

P. Then it seems there is but one commandment against which I have not sinned.

M. If you rightly knew yourself and the law of God, you would not acquit yourself of that neither. Be not offended, I speak out of love to your soul. I do not think you a thief or a robber; yet, have you never concealed the faults and bad properties of what you sold, when you knew that ignorance of these faults was the very thing that induced the person to buy? Nay, have you not often recommended your goods in such general terms, as were inconsistent with strict truth? Have you not cruelly taken advantage of the necessity of a needy seller, and beat down his ware much below its real value? These will certainly witness against you.

P. Why, Sir, after this rate you condemn all the world. According to your account, there is not a good man upon earth.

M. It is not my account, but the scripture account: There is none that doeth good, no not one, Rom. iii. 12.

P. I am glad then you do not think me worse than my neighbours. I hope I shall do as well as others, for all are sinners.

M. Therefore you think you need not be greatly troubled, if you are so too; but hope to pass in the crowd. Does not some such thought as that lurk at the bottom? But what signify numbers with God, from whose all-searching Eye no man can lie concealed, and whose Arm none can resist or escape. Had you lived in Sodom or the old World, this same thought might have lulled you asleep in the prevailing abominations, but would not have saved you from the overflowing deluge, or the streams of fire.

P. After this rate you damn all the world.

M. Damn! What a word is that! It signifies to adjudge to eternal torment, to do which belongeth only to the righteous Judge. I would with all my soul rescue all men from this misery. And with that view I now

Speak plainly and faithfully to you, and agreeably to the word of God.

P. Who then can be saved? Not you yourself. Pray, Sir, did you never sin?

M. Friend, be serious. The subject we are now upon is of the utmost importance. I have sinned as well as you; I have greatly sinned, and my sins have deserved eternal damnation; but God hath been pleased to awaken me to repentance; he hath shewn me my danger, and stirred me up to flee from the wrath to come. He hath shewn me also the way of escaping the wages of sin, opened in the blessed gospel. The offer of salvation there made, I trust I have embraced, and obtained forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

P. I hope I have repented too: I am sure, if I offend God, I am sorry for it afterwards. And as for faith — why, we are all christians, I hope, are we not?

M. If your repentance is sincere, and your faith lively and saving, your state is safe and happy. But many persons deceive themselves by a dead faith and imperfect repentance. Are you willing to have the sincerity of yours tried?

P. I am; for the trial can do me no hurt: If I am safe it is well; if I am not, I hope it is not too late to amend.

M. True repentance implies a sense of sin, its odiousness and deformity, a hatred of it, a humiliation and self-loathing on account of it, an actual forsaking of it, and a turning to God by newness of life. Is your repentance such as this?

P. I hope it is.

M. The wages of sin is death, eternal death. Do you think you deserve this death?

P. As much as other men, for all are sinners: but God is merciful.

M. Do not now talk of other men. Do you think that you deserve eternal death?

P. If God should deal with me according to strict justice, I do not: but as I think God is merciful, so I hope I shall do well enough.

M. I fear

M. I fear your notions of God's mercy are such as prevent true repentance. You seem to have entertained hopes of mercy, without being deeply sensible of your utter misery without it; to have applied the healing balsam, before you were wounded. This is what the Almighty stiles ~~healing~~ the wound of his people slightly. You have deceived yourself. You never saw yourself in a state of sin and death; you never saw sin odious; you were never greatly afraid of perishing, nor saw that there was no help or strength in yourself: therefore you never fled to him who is a Refuge from the storm. And, if you have never fled thus to Christ, as helpless and undone without him, it is plain that you are still without any saving interest in him.

See how it was with those converts mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles; St. Peter's hearers were pricked in their hearts, and said, men and brethren, what shall we do? The gaoler came trembling, through a sense of his miserable condition before he was baptized, and received forgiveness of sins. St. Paul was struck to the ground.

P. All these were infidels. I was baptized in my infancy, and bred up to know good things, and always believed.

M. God does not deal with all exactly in the same way. But take heed you do not depend too much upon these privileges. You were early baptized; but search your heart and life. Have you not lived for a long time together as without God in the world? Instead of renouncing the world, the flesh and the devil, have you not followed and been led by them? Have you not been led by the world in judging of things according to the opinions of men, in opposition to the word of God? Have you not in many things conformed to its customs contrary to the commands of God? Have you not frequently obeyed your carnal lusts and inclinations so as to violate frequently the pure law of God, if not by actual offences, yet by indulging evil thoughts, and living in lesser sins without concern? And has not the devil been for a considerable time your
master,

master, leading you to offend God by profaning his holy name and holy day ; and that for the sake of such a trifling pleasure, as plainly argues his ascendancy over you ? and have you not continued still in these things with little or no concern, hoping, notwithstanding, that all would be well ? nay, is not this still in some measure your case ? — I see you acknowledge it is, it is plain then your baptismal vow and covenant are broken, and there is an absolute necessity of turning unto God, and beginning all anew.

P. How must I begin anew ?

M. By acknowledging, that by your Departure from God you have brought yourself into a State of sin and misery ; alienated from God inclined to evil, and therefore at Enmity with God in your heart ; and that for these things you deserve his wrath, and stand on the brink of ruin, covered with guilt.

P. I am willing to forsake all sin, turn to God, and do better. Will that do ?

M. These are good resolutions, but they do not seem to proceed from a right principle. You would forsake sin, and do better, I see, with some secret dependance upon your amendment and doings, that these will fit you for acceptance, and gain you an interest in Christ : But this is a legal spirit of self-dependance, a going about to establish your own righteousness. When I see you acknowledge yourself ; when sinful, vile, and base, and, like Job, abhorring yourself ; when I see you sensible that you are unworthy of the least mercy, and unable of yourself to do any good thing ; when I see you renouncing your best deeds as defiled by sin, casting yourself before God as lost and helpless ; having no hope in yourself, but supported only by the promise of Salvation made in Jesus Christ ; when this is not only the Language of the tongue, but these convictions are deeply impressed on the Heart — When this is your case, I shall think a real work of grace is begun in your soul.

P. Why this is advising me to despair !

M. Indeed I would have you despair of all help from yourself, or on account of any thing you have done, or

can do ; for till then, you will not sufficiently value Jesus Christ, nor fly to him as your only Saviour, who came to preach deliverance to the captives, and to bind up the broken hearted.

P. I believe, all this may be necessary for a notorious sinner, or an heathen ; but I have lived in some fear of God, attended at church, and always believed.

M. I doubt you never believed at all, properly speaking ; but of this I will talk more with you another time ; at present, it is plain your repentance has not been real. You never saw and felt your danger, consequently could never be so desirous of escaping it as is necessary. You always flattered yourself with some hopes that your state was safe, or certainly would be, when you lived a little better ; which was at bottom depending on yourself. And with respect to the other branches of repentance, such as forsaking sin — it is evident to yourself you have lived without concern in some lesser habitual sin ; and as for turning to God, you were never sensible, that in the stream of your affections, and the general course of your life, you were turned from him.

Indeed (though you seem not to know it) the ruling principle in you, and every carnal man, is a principle of sin and corruption. Instead of seeking to please God, you have all along been seeking to please yourself, to procure some gratification to corrupted nature, such as sensual delights, riches, worldly esteem, ease, or the like. This hath been the ruling principle throughout your whole conduct, instead of obeying that command, do all to the glory of God. Nay, if you search narrowly, you will find in your heart an enmity against God. For so saith the apostle Rom. viii. 7. the carnal mind (and such is every man's by nature) is enmity against God. And this enmity shews itself in opposing God's will, by doing what he hath forbidden, and leaving undone what he hath commanded ; and also in flying from God as your enemy, and endeavouring to hide yourself from him like Adam. Have you not passed days and weeks without one serious thought of God, though you were all that time receiving mercies at his hand ? Have you not banished and sup-
pressed

pressed such thoughts, when they have risen in your mind? Have you not fled from serious thoughts of God and eternity, as enemies to your peace, and drowned them in worldly cares, vain conversation, and idle amusements? Have you not thus fled from God? You know you have. — Hitherto, (suffer me to be plain with you) you have gone wrong, and have been insensible of your danger; deceived yourself, and spoken peace to your soul, when there was no peace. Now consider what you have heard from me, read your Bible, examine yourself, and pray unto God to give you a sense of your real state, and a right judgment in all things.

DIALOGUE II.

Minister.

I WAS in hopes of seeing you before now, that we might talk again on the same important subject.

P. Indeed, Sir, I did not like what you said so well, as to hear any more. And I should not have come to you now, had it not been for something I heard in your sermon yesterday.

M. But in what was it that I offended you?

P. I thought you bore too hard upon me, and I was afraid you would make me melancholy.

M. Do you not think that what I said proceeded from love to your soul?

P. I really believe it did.

M. Do you think I said any thing that was not true?

P. I did think so then. You seemed to judge too hardly of me, and to put me on a level with the worst of men. But I am now convinced that what you said was all true.

M. What has produced this change of your sentiments?

P. Yours

P. Your yesterday's Sermon about the Day of Judgment. I have been uneasy ever since I heard it. For I am greatly afraid, that, if the Day of Judgment was now come, it would find me unprepared. And then — the Lord have mercy upon my poor soul!

M. It would be too late then to cry and hope for mercy. But what was it particularly that made you form such a judgment of yourself?

P. You shewed us from the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, that judgment begins with a separation of the godly from the wicked; and this separation was owing to a separation made in this life, when the righteous were taken from among the wicked, by leaving the works and the society of the ungodly. I was not sensible any such change had been wrought in me, and am therefore afraid I am still in the state of sin, in which, you told us, all men are by nature.

M. You have great reason to be afraid. I told you that those would be esteemed righteous on that day, who had fled to the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness to justify them, and had been made holy by the spirit of God, creating in them a new heart, and had evidenced his change by an holy conversation through the remaining part of their life, how many or great soever their sins had been: and that the wicked were those that had lived and died without faith in Christ, and the indwellings of God's spirit, however orderly and decent their conduct was.

P. Ay, that it was that terrified me. You told us, that the most upright man had committed sins enough to condemn him, if he died without an interest in Christ, and without being accepted as righteous through him. But if this mercy and acceptance through Jesus Christ were obtained before death, no man's sins would be remembered against him on that day. And to prove this you shewed us, that in the proceedings of the last day, as related by St. Matthew, no sins of the righteous are mentioned by the Judge, nor any good deeds of the wicked.

M. The wicked, that is, they that lived and died without an humbling sense of their natural corruption and actual

actual sins, so as never by faith to fly for refuge to God's mercy in Christ, have, properly speaking, no good works to be mentioned, for all they do is from a wrong principle; * either from selfish and worldly ends, or in order to gain an interest in Christ, and pardon of their sins on account of their doings; which is seeking salvation by the law of works. On this account their works are not regarded, being not done in faith; not proceeding from a principle of love; which principle none have till they are one with Christ, John xvii. 21. who is the true vine, and believers are the branches deriving life from him, John x. 1. and without whom we can do nothing acceptable in God's sight, John xv. 5. On the other hand, the righteous being themselves accepted through Christ, their sins are not mentioned, because long before forgiven and blotted out: and their imperfect services, being accepted through Jesus their High Priest, who bears the iniquity of their holy things, receive at the hands of the bountiful Judge a reward of grace. So that that which principally distinguishes the godly from the ungodly, is, that the one is accepted as righteous, and has obtained forgiveness through Christ, according to the new or gospel-covenant: the other, never being deeply sensible of his sinful lost state (indeed too proud to acknowledge it) hath not applied for the mercy represented in the gospel, and so at the day of judgment stands on the foundation of the old covenant or law of good works, which requires perfect obedience: consequently he is without a Mediator, and without forgiveness, and therefore must be condemned.

P. But then, why are works mentioned at all on that day, as we find they are?

M. I gave you two reasons for this. First, Because, though they are not the ground of any man's acceptance, yet they shew a man to be in a justified state; for we cannot bear the fruit of holiness, unless we are in and abide in Christ, John xv. 4. And they who do, not act

* * For the true principle from which good works proceed, see the 11th, 12th, and 13th Articles of the Church of England.

righteously.

righteously, deceive themselves if they think themselves righteous: so that good works serve to distinguish believers from unbelievers. Secondly, Because the different degrees of faithfulness makes a difference between the godly themselves, so that God is pleased graciously to confer upon them different degrees of glory. That any man is at all saved, is owing to his faith in the Redeemer: his degree of glory is proportioned to his fruitfulness and diligence in the vineyard.

P. I always thought that we christians were all believers, one as much as another: And that at the day of judgment they would be reckoned godly that lived orderly and uprightly, among whom I reckoned myself and all that were better than I; and that the profane and ungodly, and all that were secretly wicked and ill-designed, would be condemned. Indeed, I had always some fears that I was not good enough; I did not know how great a number would be acknowledged righteous; but I thought I stood a better chance than many, or most that I knew.

M. You did not learn this from the word of God. But what think you now?

P. I see that all depends upon obtaining, whilst on earth, mercy, and forgiveness of all that is past; and that not on account of any thing done by me, but through faith in Jesus Christ. But what that faith is I know not: This I know, that I have been all along out of the way.

M. Indeed I think you have; and it is high time for you to awake, and seek the Lord in earnest, lest he cut you off in the midst of your sins, and appoint you your portion, where is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

P. Pray, sir, tell me what I must do to be saved?

M. What think you of your past life?

P. I see that I have been daily offending God, by breaking his commandments, and pleasing myself, not him; and that now I stand under the guilt of thousands of sins, the least of which were enough to condemn me.

M. What think you of your good deeds?

P. I have none to think about. I see sin in every thing I do. My pride, on account of my being not so bad as others, my worldliness, my vanity, and trifling spirit in prayer and hearing sermons, were enough to condemn me, if I had done nothing else.

M. And what do you intend to do?

P. I will do better, I will strive against sin, I will pray.

M. But all these duties, you say, have been heretofore mixed with sin; how then do you hope they will make you accepted now? Or could you do these things ever so well, all is your necessary bounden duty: The good deeds you may do, cannot make amends for past offences. On all these accounts, by the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified.

P. I see no way—If ever there was a lost soul, I am he—What shall I do?

M. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Acts xvi. 31. This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he hath sent. John vi. 29. And by him all that believe are justified from all things. Acts xiii. 39. Come, naked, sinful, and helpless as you are to God thro' Christ for mercy. He is able to save to the uttermost all those who come unto God through him, seeing he hath died for them, and ever liveth to make Intercession for them. Heb. vii. 25. He can wash you from the guilt of all your sins, destroy the power and dominion of sin in you, sanctify you thoroughly in body, soul, and spirit, and present you to the Father without spot or blemish.

P. I have no manner of doubt of Christ's power to save, for he is the Son of God, but I fear, I am not a fit person to be saved.

M. In order to determine that, look into your Bible. There this offer of salvation is made, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. 1 Tim. i. 15. Now what think you? Are you of the number he came to save, or are you not?

P. But he will not, he does not save all sinners.

M. That is because they will not come to him, to be saved. Of this complains, John v. 40. Ye will not come to me that ye may have life.

P. But

P. But I find certain conditions mentioned necessary to qualify men, which I fear I have not. It is said, repent and believe the gospel; and he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.

M. If you are weary with the burden of sin, loath it, and earnestly desire to be saved from the guilt and pollution of it;—a true repentance is begun in you. And if for this purpose you apply unto Christ as held forth in the gospel, this is the faith that saveth. And for baptism,—you are already baptized with water; and if you are willing to renew and confirm your baptismal vow, come unto Christ, out of his fulness to receive the inward and spiritual grace, a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness; for he alone can give it.

P. It is said, many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able; and, not every one that saith unto me, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. This makes me fear and keep at a distance.

M. Whither then do you intend to go?

P. I know no place; for there is no other name under heaven whereby one may be saved.

M. Then apply to Christ—to escape the wages of sin, the curse of the law, and the wrath of God: Fly to him for pardon, peace, grace and glory. And, if seeking to enter into the kingdom is not enough, strive. If many that say, Lord! Lord! fail; let this be the language of your heart and life, as well as of the tongue. Not that, after all, any diligence and strength of yours is the thing which will gain acceptance. But when faith is true, lively, and saving, it will be attended with these and the like works.

P. This is what I fear, that my faith is not true faith.

M. If your faith is true faith, you will have confidence in nothing in yourself, no works or strength of your own; but you will rely solely on God's promise of mercy made in Christ. A true faith will also in some degree be lively, shewing itself in a zeal of God and godliness, and a steady warfare against sin. And this will be also saving: You will be thereby saved not only from guilt, but from the power of sin, and the dominion of your lusts; and this will give you a good hope and expectation, and by degrees, a
firm

firm persuasion. of being saved from wrath in the great day of the Lord Jesus.

P. I cannot find I have this faith ; therefore dare not believe that God will forgive and receive me.

M. Then come unto Christ, embrace and depend on God's promises in him, that your faith may grow up to this. For this faith itself is of the operation of the spirit of God, and therefore to be sought of him by prayer, through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

P. I dare not thus embrace the promises. come to and depend on Christ, for I am utterly unworthy of the least mercy.

M. When do you think you shall make yourself worthy ?

P. Never.

M. Then come to him just as you are, to be made worthy.

P. May I dare thus to come to Christ, and depend upon him for salvation ?

M. Do not depend on my word, but hear the word of God. He invites you to come : Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, Isa. lv. 1. He commands you to come ; this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ. He promises to receive them that come : Him that cometh unto me I will in on wise cast out, John vi. 37. He threatens if you do not come : He that believeth not shall be damned, Mark xvi. 16.

P. But to whom are these words addressed ?

M. To you, to me, and to every one that hears them : Preach the gospel to every creature. Mark xvi. 15. They are addressed to those in particular, that see their want of salvation, because they alone will receive them. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, Matt. xi. 28.

P. These arguments from scripture stop my mouth. But still I cannot believe Christ will receive such a sinner as I am.

M. This is what I said before : Faith is not of man, but the gift of God, sought by the spirit in them that hear the gospel.

gospel. Therefore seek this and every other grace of God by prayer in the name of Jesus. And to encourage you to pray and hope, consider that God gave Christ for this very purpose, to save sinners: For this he came into the world; for this he laboured, wept and bled; for this he reigns and intercedes in heaven. He is so far from being unwilling to save, that he is offended with those who will not come to him to be saved. When he was upon earth, he wept over Jerusalem on this account.

I know not what to say.

M. What do you intend to do?

P. I am greatly afraid I shall never be saved. But I know there is no other way but God's free mercy in Christ. Therefore will I seek it as long as I live; and if I perish, it shall be at the foot of Christ's cross, calling for mercy.

M. Continue this resolution, and all the precious promises in the gospel are your own. But take heed that you do not suffer these impressions to wear away, and so settle in a false peace. Do not seek rest any where but in Christ. Beware lest worldly cares or pleasures divert your attention from the things of God, and lest sin grieve the Holy Spirit. Remember it is said, if a man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

D I A L O G U E III.

Parishioner.

SIR, I hope you will not be offended at the trouble I give you: but I want your advice very much.

M. You need make no compliments, my friend, I should be glad if all the people in my parish would give me the same trouble you do. But what is the matter?

P. I have been for some time so as I was never in my life before: I have been afraid I should be damned. This hath filled me with thoughts and cares day and night. You had no need to caution me against the danger of

worldly cares and pleasures : for wherever I was, or whatever I have been doing, my sins and hell have been still before my eyes.

M. What have you thought of your sins? in what light have they appeared to you?

P. Sins committed many years ago have now risen in my mind, and condemned me. The remembrance of the sins of my youth has followed me, as if committed but yesterday. And some awful scriptures that I have heard and read, seem to be sentences of my condemnation. I believe I have thought an hundred times of these words : The wages of sin is death.

M. Have you been looking into your heart, seen and lamented the corruption there?

P. I did not use to understand what you meant by looking into the heart; but I think I do now. I find in myself a strong inclination to many sins, though I am convinced that I deserve God's wrath on account of complying with these inclinations heretofore. Indeed it is much better with me now than it was. Formerly I have been led by my own wicked heart to delight in idle company; to talk of myself in an empty vain manner; to be greedy after the world; to pass slightly over, or entirely neglect, prayer and other duties, as a tedious burden, and be guilty of other sins. At present, I bless God, it is not so; but all my thoughts are in a manner taken up about the care of my soul, and the world to come.

M. I fear you do not know your heart so well as you imagine. You seem to think that all things are already become new in you. But be not deceived: such a cage of unclean birds, as the heart of every man is by nature, is not so soon cleansed from its various lusts and vile affections. These, that seem to be rooted out, are only asleep for a season: be watchful therefore; they will one day awake again. Some of them, probably, are only exchanged for others, as bad and dangerous, such as pride, presumption, and the like.

P. Really, Sir, I have had some fear of that. For you well know, that the day I was thinking what a sinful wretch I was, and, what would become of me in the next world;

world : when these words come strongly into my mind, I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely. I am sure they are somewhere in the Bible, but I cannot find them. However, they gave me much comfort, and I have been very easy ever since. Now a neighbour, that I have been talking with, tells me, " this is to be looked on as a word from God, " and that I am henceforth to look on myself as a converted man. But I fear this would be presumption. Now what do you think of this ?

M. I must desire some time to observe your temper and conduct, before I can resolve this question.

The words you mentioned are in the prophet Hosea, xiv. 4. They were perhaps spoken more immediately of the restoration of the captive Jews : but they contain a sweet promise perfectly in the gospel strain, and are therefore free for every humble soul to embrace by faith. The Prophet you see at verse 1, 2, 3, exhorts the people to repentance and humiliation for sin : O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God ; for thou hast fallen by iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord. Say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously — For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. Now, as God hath given you a sense of your sinful, helpless state, and a desire of turning to him, like this which the Prophet describes as preparatory to an answer of peace, I hope the following promise belongs to you : I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely ; for mine anger is turned away from him, verse 4. I hope too, that the comfort, which you found in applying the promise to yourself by a particular faith, proceeded from the Spirit of God : in the same manner as I look on that conviction of sin, which filled you with fear and self-abasement, when you called to mind your sinfulness, and God's Judgement denounced against sinners, to be the work of the same Spirit. For it is he that convinceth the world of sin and of righteousness. But this I must tell you : all these feelings are to be suspected, till we see what fruit follows in the heart and life. But though these are sometimes owing to the Spirit of God, and come well recommended, when, as in your case, they are so closely connected with the word of God : yet the

enemy of souls sometimes imitates these sensible experiences in order to deceive. And it is impossible to say how much our natural temper and spirits may contribute thereto.

P. Pray, Sir, tell me plainly, what you think of my state.

M. Satan, I tell you, sometimes puts on the appearance of an angel of light, in order to deceive. Those sensible experiences sometimes vouchsafed by the Spirit of God, and impressions made on men's minds, of which sort are what the scriptures term peace in believing, and joy in the Holy Ghost: these the enemy sometimes imitates, and thereby deludes hypocrites into spiritual pride, and even the godly sometimes, so as to puff them up, and make them secure and careless. But there are two tokens of grace, which the devil will not, cannot effect: these are, an holy heart, steadily hating sin; and an holy life, having respect to all God's commandments. Have these, and evidence the one by the other; and continue for some considerable time: thus to adorn your profession — Then I shall not have the least doubt but you are in a state of grace.

P. As far as I know my own heart, I would not willingly offend God for the whole world. I love those that seem to be his servants, and would go upon my hands and knees to do them good, or to make others like them. I love to hear his word, to pray; and to talk of good things; and, I think, I could die with pleasure, if it was his will.

M. Very well. These are good signs. But this is the fervour of your first love. It will not always be so with you. So was it with the Israelites after passing the red sea, the Galatians, and the church of Ephesus. But each of these grew colder afterwards. And the prophet Jeremiah, ch. ii. 2. St. Paul, Gal. iv. 15. and our Lord, Rev. ii. 4. reprove them for it.

P. Sir, I believe you know my danger better than I do myself. Pray direct me what I shall do.

M. Strive to make your calling and election sure and evident, both to yourself and others, by bringing forth the Fruits of righteousness in a good conversation.

My first advice is, be humble, and walk humbly with thy God. Let the remembrance of your past life of Sin and folly still cover you with shame. Recollect the many aggravating

gravating circumstances of a life hitherto spent in rebellion against God ; during all which he daily heaped mercies upon you and yours ; giving food and raiment, health and strenght ; and continued these mercies to you, while you forgot the hand that gave them, and returned evil for good. He spared you in all your provocations ; and at last opened your eyes to see your danger, stirred you up to avoid it, and now hath given you a good hope, through grace, of obtaining eternal life. Thus compare together what God hath done, and you deserved, and thus learn humility. Keep a watchful eye also upon the remains of indwelling sin still in you. And let every sinful Inclination, vain thought, backwarkness to duty, and failure in it, teach you to be humble and fear. Thus, distrustful yourself, look up to God for continual support, like an helpless little child ; expecting through the mediation of Jesus Christ, to be assisted in every time of need.

My next advice is, keep a conscience void of offence. If you have wronged any man, be not ashamed to acknowledge it ; and according to your power make restitution, that the accursed thing may not cleave unto you. Take heed that you grieve not the spirit of God by unholy walking, lest you provoke him to forsake you. To this end watch over your heart, repress its first inclinations to sin, and be watchful against temptation from without ; fixing your eye especially on the sin with which you have heretofore been most easily beset. If at any time sin prevail against you, do not endeavour to forget it, or hide it in your bosom : but go to God immediately ; take shame to yourself ; plead the gospel promises to returning sinners, looking unto Jesus Christ as your all-sufficient sacrifice, and advocate with the Father ; and never cease wrestling with God in prayer, until he again speak peace to your troubled soul, and fill you with a greater fear of offending him.

As I hope you are now planted in God's vineyard, be fruitful. Bear on your heart a sense of God's love to sinners in Jesus Christ. Consider in particular, what God hath done for you, in calling you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Remember how you lay fast asleep in sin and fatal security, when God awaked you to see your
danger

danger and escape it. Think what would have been your condition in eternity, if God had left you to yourself. Think how many still go on in the same fatal path in which you trod. And let the sense of God's distinguishing love to you excite you to some return. Love him, because he first loved you. And let love to your heavenly Father influence your thoughts, and words, and actions.

Let your meditations of God be sweet and frequent. Lift up your heart to him that seeth in secret, and trieth the heart and reins. Seek a close communion with the Father of your spirit: and to this end, endeavour to withdraw your thoughts from worldly things, and to raise your affections from earth to heaven, to those things which are not seen but by the eye of faith. That thus you may walk by faith, guided by it as the eye of the soul, and raised by it to heavenly mindedness; so as to love and delight in God.

Instead of your former vain conversation, henceforth let your tongue be employed to God's glory; in speaking good of his name; in prayer and praise to your great benefactor; in telling others what he hath done for your soul; warning sinners of their danger, encouraging them; that fear God to be bold and hearty in his service.

And let your conduct in life be such as becometh the gospel. You are called to fight the good fight of faith; see that you faint not, neither be weary in well-doing. Shew that you are alive unto God by living unto God, by devoting yourself to his service, and diligence therein. Do something for him that hath done so much for you. Be loving unto all men, for they are the work of God's hands: Do good unto all men according to your ability. Your time and strength, and every other talent, are given you to be improved, lay them out in acts of charity and love. Let your heart be enlarged to all men, not excepting your enemies: Let these have your prayers and forgiveness, and be ready to overcome Evil with good.

See also that you shew the power of Godliness in the conscientious discharge of relative duties. Be kindly affectionate and tender-hearted to all about you. To those of your family shew yourself an example of gentleness, love, and forbearance. Express of your regard for their souls

as well as for their bodies, by a devout, serious course of family-worship. Let those of your household and of your acquaintance see that you have a new heart by your leading a new life, studying in all things to be conformed to the will and word of God. Be strict and conscientious in all your dealings. Render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, and custom to whom custom is due, as well as every other lawful debt: Not defrauding either the king or your fellow subjects, or any way encouraging those that do.

Shew a particular regard for them that are of the household of faith, all the sincerely godly, for Christ's sake. For as all men were originally created after God's image, in them is this image in some measure restored. These therefore in a peculiar manner belong to Christ, being washed from their sins in his blood, and sanctified by his spirit. And to animate you to greater diligence in this work and labour of love, view often with the eyes of faith the glorious reward set before you, the eternal weight of glory to be bestowed on that day when Christ shall reward acts of mercy and love, done in his name, as if done to himself.

Quickened by this principle, and encouraged by this prospect, strive to grow in knowledge, and purity, and faith, and love, and godly fear; in meekness and every christian grace. Study to promote God's glory, the welfare of all men, and such a disposition in your own soul, as may render you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. And, in order to promote this work of sanctification in you, wait for God's blessing and grace in a conscientious use of the ordinances, in prayer public and private, hearing and reading God's word; and confirm your covenant with God at his table. Thus may you hope to be a fruitful vine, and experience in your soul those blessings, which the prophet immediately adds to that promise of free mercy, in which you have found so much consolation. Hosea, xiv. 5, 6, 7, I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon; growing upwards by faith and love, and downwards by humility. His branches shall spread; and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that

that dwell under his shadow shall return from all their wanderings : they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine : the scent (or blossom) thereof shall be as the vine of Lebanon, beautiful, fruitful, and pleasant in God's Sight.

P. Sir, I thank you. I see a great work before me ; but by God's help, I hope I shall be able to hold out to the end.

M. You must expect many difficulties and much opposition. The way to heaven is the way of the cross, and through much tribulation. The world, and flesh, and devil are strong enemies, and they are closely leagued together, Your own corrupt nature will be always near to tempt, discourage, and draw you back ; for this will still be your burden ; your greatest plague will be that of your own Heart. And, as soon as you appear to be going out of the broad way, in which the generality walk to destruction, you must expect the world will be upon you. Not only the careless and prophane will sneer and ridicule you, but the more decent formalists also will be highly offended. They will say in their heart, as the Pharisees of old : In doing this, in going out of the common fashionable road, and pretending to uncommon strictness, thou condemnest us also. And these his two allies, the world and the flesh, the devil can manage with wonderful skill, and sometimes throw in some evil thoughts himself. But be not discouraged ; God is above all, CHRIST even liveth to make intercession for us, and to save in every difficulty those that come unto God through him. Holy angels will be employed as your guardians ; and all the truly godly will by your loving brethren and ready friends. They that are for you are more than they that are against you. Be not your own enemy, and nothing can hurt you. However, be not high-minded, but fear. Happy is the man that leareth always.

F I N I S.

